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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - IRAQ LEBANON-SYRIA
PARIS - THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

- [1](#)1. IRAQ
- [1](#)2. LEBANON-SYRIA

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

FRONT PAGES AND EDITORIALS, DEVOTED TO TODAY'S DAY OF SOCIAL PROTEST, SINGLE OUT SALARIES AND A DETERIORATING BUYING POWER AS THE MAJOR REASON FOR THE PROTEST, AHEAD OF CONCERNS FOR CHANGES TO THE 35-HOUR WORKWEEK.

LEBANON, SYRIA'S PULLOUT PLANS, AND DISARMING HEZBOLLAH ARE PART OF TODAY'S INTERNATIONAL STORIES. IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO ALEXANDRINE BOUILHET REPORTS ON WALID JUMBLATT'S VISIT TO THE EU, WHERE "HE IS PLAYING EUROPE AGAINST THE U.S." SHE QUOTES A EUROPEAN DIPLOMAT: "THE U.S. WANTS TO IMPOSE A NEW REGIME IN DAMASCUS. WE ONLY WANT LEBANON'S SOVEREIGNTY." A SEPARATE REPORT IN LEFT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR REPORTS A SIMILAR STANCE ON BEHALF OF A FRENCH DIPLOMAT. (SEE PART C) IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE POINT, GENERAL AOUN, EXILED IN FRANCE, SAYS IN AN INTERVIEW: "WE CANNOT TRUST SYRIA. IT DOES NOT WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON AND PREFERS A CONFRONTATION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. SYRIA'S REGIME IS INCAPABLE OF EITHER DIALOGUE OR NEGOTIATIONS."

THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE ATTACK ON THE CONVOY CARRYING GIULIANA SGRENA IN IRAQ CONTINUE. IN POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER PARIS MATCH, EDITORIALIST ALAIN GENESTAR, WHO "LOVES AMERICA," IS NEVERTHELESS CHAGRINED BY "THE FEAR THAT LEADS AMERICAN SOLDIERS TO SHOOT WITHOUT REASON OR WARNING. SIMPLY BY PRECAUTION. AMERICA'S WAR IN IRAQ, AND BEYOND THAT, HOW IT CONDUCTS THAT WAR, TARNISHES AMERICA'S REPUTATION." (SEE PART C)

THE ASSASSINATION OF ASLAN MASKHADOV AND THE SITUATION IN CHECHNYA ARE THE SUBJECTS CHOSEN BY BRUNO FRAPPAT IN LA CROIX FOR HIS EDITORIAL: "OF ALL THE BLACK HOLES ON THIS EARTH HIDDEN FROM THE WORLD, . THE WORST IS CHECHNYA, WHERE FOR THE PAST ELEVEN YEARS A HORRIBLE WAR HAS BEEN WAGED. RUSSIA IS NOT LETTING GO OF ITS PREY. AND TODAY, RUSSIA IS PROCLAIMING ITS VICTORY WITHOUT SHAME. MASKHAROV WAS NO LONGER IN CONTROL OF MUCH. HIS RELATIVE MODERATION PUT HIM IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION, BETWEEN TWO TYPES OF RADICALISM: RUSSIA'S AND THE ISLAMISTS', LIKE BASSAIEV. THE KREMLIN HAS HUNTED HIM WITHOUT MERCY, AND IS NOW STANDING PROUDLY BESIDES ITS TROPHY."

POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE PARISIEN CARRIES A REPORT ON THE RECENTLY RELEASED FRENCH GUANTANAMO DETAINEES. CHRISTOPHE DUBOIS, WHO TITLES HIS STORY: "THE FRENCH SAID TO HAVE SUFFERED ABUSE IN GUANTANAMO," REPORTS THAT ONE OF THE DETAINEES, PATEL, HAS BEEN RELEASED BY THE FRENCH POLICE, AND THAT BENCHALLALI, RELEASED LAST JULY FROM GUANTANAMO, CLAIMS TO HAVE SUFFERED ABUSE WHILE DETAINED BY THE U.S.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

IRAQ

"WAR AND AMERICA'S REPUTATION"

ALAIN GENESTAR IN POPULAR WEEKLY PARIS MATCH (03/10):
"INVESTIGATIONS (INTO SHOOTING ACCIDENTS IN IRAQ) LEAD NOWHERE. THEY EXONERATE THE SHOOTER OR TONE DOWN MILITARY RESPONSIBILITY IN ORDER NOT TO AFFECT SOLDIER MORALE. THESE REPEATED BLUNDERS REVEAL WHAT THIS WAR IS ALL ABOUT. IT IS A BLIND DISORGANIZED WAR, WHOSE PURPOSE IS NOT TO HERALD THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO SELF-DETERMINATION, BUT TO HERALD 'GOOD.' WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT IN BUSH'S MIND, THIS IS A 'CRUSADE' IN THE NAME OF 'GOOD' OVER 'EVIL.' A SOLDIER WHO BELIEVES HE IS INHABITED BY GOOD, WHOSE PRESIDENT SPEAKS OF GOD TO JUSTIFY HIS WAR, DOES NOT ACT LIKE OTHER SOLDIERS. HE ACTS LIKE A RIGHTER OF WRONGS ON A MISSION. WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE SOLDIERS' FEAR. BEING TARGETS OF BLIND ATTACKS, THEY SHOOT AT ANYTHING THAT MOVES. AMERICANS, WHETHER SHERIFFS OR THE FBI, HAVE ALWAYS EXERCISED THEIR POWER WITH COLD EFFICIENCY. THEY HAVE EVERY RIGHT, INCLUDING THAT OF SHOOTING WITHOUT

PRIOR WARNING. AND THE RIGHT TO KILL OUT OF PRECAUTION. I LOVE AMERICA, ITS PEOPLE, ITS CREATIVITY, ITS LOVE OF FREEDOM. AMERICA'S WAR IN IRAQ, AND BEYOND THAT, HOW IT CONDUCTS THAT WAR, TARNISHES AMERICA'S REPUTATION. TO LOVE AMERICA IS ALSO TELLING AMERICA, IN ANSWER TO ITS USE OF VIOLENCE, TO CONTROL ITS FEAR."

LEBANON-SYRIA

"JUMBLATT PLAYING EUROPE AGAINST THE U.S."
ALEXANDRINE BOUIHLET IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (03/10):
"WALID JUMBLAT AND HIS DELEGATION ARE ASKING THE EU TO SEPARATE ITSELF FROM AMERICA'S POLICY IN LEBANON. HE FAVORS SYRIA'S PULLOUT, BUT NOT DISARMING HEZBOLLAH. THE LEBANESE OPPOSITION IS ASKING EUROPE TO SHOW CLEMENCY TOWARDS HEZBOLLAH. THE EU SEEMS TO HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE MESSAGE ABOUT THE TAIEF AGREEMENT, WHICH GIVES DAMASCUS THE OPPORTUNITY TO WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON WHILE SAVING FACE. AFTER SHARING WASHINGTON'S STANCE ON THE LEBANESE QUESTION, EUROPE IS BEGINNING TO TAKE ITS DISTANCE, INCLUDING ON THE INTERPRETATION OF RESOLUTION 1559. SAYS A EU DIPLOMAT: 'WE, AS OPPOSED TO THE U.S., DO NOT WANT TO ISOLATE SYRIA. THE U.S. WANTS TO IMPOSE A NEW REGIME IN DAMASCUS. WE JUST WANT LEBANON TO REGAIN ITS SOVEREIGNTY, NOT A CRISIS WITH SYRIA.' JUMBLATT HOPES TO BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE FRANCE'S ANTI-SYRIA AND PRO-U.S. POSITION WHEN IN PARIS TOMORROW."

"SLOW PULLOUT"
FARID AICHOUNE IN LEFT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR (03/10): "WHAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IS WHETHER THE AMERICANS AND THE SYRIANS ARE SPEAKING ONLY ABOUT LEBANON. AND IF PARIS AND WASHINGTON HAVE THE SAME REASONS FOR RE-ACTIVATING RESOLUTION [1559](#). A FRENCH DIPLOMAT BELIEVES THAT THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION IS MORE CONCERNED WITH SECURING THE IRAQI-SYRIAN BORDER THAN WITH GIVING LEBANON BACK ITS SOVEREIGNTY. WILL THE LEBANESE ONCE AGAIN BE HOSTAGE TO THE MAJOR POWERS AND THE VICTIMS OF A FOOL'S BARGAIN?" LEACH